

# **2004 King County Comprehensive Plan Update Area Zoning Study**

Department of Development and Environmental Services

<b>Study Area:</b> <b>Auburn Lea Hill Urban Separator</b>
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## **Summary**

This 164-acre area is designated Urban Separator on the King County Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map. The existing zoning is R-1, Urban Residential – one home per acre. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not the study area should be redesignated from Urban Separator to Urban Residential, (4-12 homes per acre).

## **Background**

The Countywide Planning Policies call for King County and cities to implement Urban Separators. Different from the Rural Area and Natural Resource Lands, Urban Separators are low-density areas within the Urban Growth Area that create open space corridors, provide a visual contrast to continuous development and reinforce the unique identities of communities. Urban Separators can play a significant role in preserving environmentally sensitive areas and in providing habitat for fish and wildlife. They also provide recreational benefits, such as parks and trails, and meet the Growth Management Act's requirement for greenbelts and open space in the Urban Growth Area.

The study area is within the City of Auburn Potential Annexation Area (PAA). Auburn objected to the Urban Separator designation for 164 acres, believing this area was suitable for higher residential density. There are about 700 other acres of land designated as Urban Separator on Lea Hill that Auburn supports. Since the study area is within Auburn's PAA, it is in both jurisdictions' interest to discuss differences in land use plan designations prior to annexation.

A public meeting was held at Lea Hill elementary school in late 2003 to discuss this potential land use change with area residents and property owners. Strong citizen support was expressed for retaining the existing Urban Separator designation. Citizens also were concerned about the impending sale and future use of a large property owned by the City of Kent that is adjacent to the Urban Separator.

## **Applicable Countywide Planning Policy:**

**LU-27** Urban separators are low-density areas or areas of little development within the Urban Growth Area. Urban separators shall be defined as permanent low-density lands which protect adjacent resource lands, Rural Areas, and environmentally sensitive areas and create open space corridors within and between Urban Areas which provide environmental, visual, and recreational and wildlife benefits. Designated urban separators shall not be redesignated in the future (in the 20-year planning cycle) to other urban uses or higher densities. The maintenance of these urban separators is a

regional as well as a local concern. Therefore, no modifications should be made to the development regulations governing these areas without King County review and concurrence.

**Applicable King County Comprehensive Plan Policies:**

- P-118** Urban Separators are corridors of land that define community or municipal identities and boundaries, provide visual breaks in the urban landscape, and link parks and open space within and outside the Urban Growth Area. These urban corridors should include and link parks and other lands that contain significant environmentally sensitive features, provide wildlife habitat or critical resource protection, contain defining physical features, or contain historic resources. The residential density for land so designated should be maintained at one unit per acre, provided that lands that are sending sites under the Transfer of Density Program may transfer density at a rate of at least four units per acre
- P-119** King County should actively pursue designating Urban Separators in the unincorporated area and work with the cities to establish permanent, Urban Separators within the incorporated area that link with and enhance King County's Urban Separator corridors.

**Analysis:**

The 164-acre study area is designated as an Urban Separator in the Countywide Planning Policies, with the notation that it is an area for further discussion with the City of Auburn.

Local residents point out that wildlife, numerous unrated wetlands and streams are present within the Urban Separator. About 50 citizens nearly unanimously pointed out at a community meeting that these features of the area are worth preserving. They made it clear they placed a higher value on preserving the existing Urban Separator than on increasing the development potential of their own properties.

The City of Kent is selling the adjacent large property and is in the process of preparing a land use plan for this site. Kent staff indicates at least one alternative under consideration is to designate a portion of that property as an Urban Separator.

The City of Auburn has not committed to a time frame for future annexation of the remainder of their Lea Hill PAA.

**Conclusions:**

The study area is consistent with the description and serves the functions of an Urban Separator as defined by the Countywide Planning Policies and the King County Comprehensive Plan.

The *possibility* exists that the existing Urban Separator may be expanded, based on the outcome of the City of Kent planning process. It is not known at this time whether King County and Auburn will reach agreement on further modifications to the Lea Hill Urban Separator. Unless a proposal can be developed that is both mutually acceptable to affected jurisdictions and affected property owners, no further changes to the Lea Hill Urban Separator are warranted.

**Executive Staff Recommendation:**

No change is recommended. Retain the existing land use designation and zoning.